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(Aldine Series)

BUFFALO BILL  
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2D

# THE SPECTRE OUTLAW



R.P. /

## IN DEADLY PERIL!

The two scouts looked from the dizzy height upon the yelling redskins. Next moment the end of a rope came hurtling down from the crag above. "That's to enable the brutes to attack us at close quarters!" gasped Wild Bill,



# The Spectre Outlaw.

Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill on a Weird Trail.

## CHAPTER I.

### Attacked by Indians.

FIVE waggons and fifteen well-armed, mounted men were picking their way through a wilderness of bare rocks, going east, laden with gold. The whole party consisted of twenty-seven miners and two women—one a fair and attractive girl-companion to the other, the wife of Jake Simpson, placer-miner of Bonanza Camp. They had struck out of camp that morning at early sunrise, and save for a short mid-day rest had been travelling ever since with the intention of reaching a destination called Misery Point by sundown.

Many of them in quitting the Wild West mining camp had bidden goodbye to the scene of their success; they had found sufficient gold to keep them, if not in luxury at least in comfort, for the remainder of their days. Many others were simply bent on taking a pleasure jaunt into civilised parts for a time after years of toil and innumerable hardships. The spirits of the whole party ran high, for they had completed the most dangerous portion of the journey without mishap. A band of free-booters infested Bonanza Camp, and they had half-dreaded an attack from these gentry. As the last waggon lumbered out of the rocky defile a cheer broke from the mounted escort.

"Ah, that's more like it. That's good fur the blues. I'll be dad-blistered ef we ain't going ter have a real high-grade time of it arter all," exclaimed a burly miner, who brought up the rear.

"I jest reckon we'll be flashing the yaller dust across Deadshot Kraus's bar fur good red liquor ter-night,"

chuckled his companion, an old 'Frisco man.

The first speaker's eyes glistened.

"Say, pard, I shouldn't jest mind ef I ware surrounding a quart of Dead-shot's drink now," he ejaculated.

"That's so, but— Thunder an' lightning, if them ain't Injuns 'way yonder, I ain't 'Frisco Joe!"

He gave a hoarse yell, and spurred along to his companions ahead.

"Say, pard, them's Injuns 'way yonder. Better trim yer guns!" he shouted. "They're coming fur us on their mustangs."

A thin dark line seemed all at once to break loose from the base of a range of bleak hills in the distance. If they were Indians they must at least have been a couple of miles away. After scanning the distant line for some minutes some of the party, with more force than politeness, ventured to dissent from 'Frisco Joe's deduction.

"Guess it ain't much concern of mine. Move ahead, yer blarmed idiots!" exclaimed 'Frisco Joe, in disgust.

This piece of advice was promptly acted upon, and the cavalcade, keeping closer together than before, began to move along with rather more speed. 'Frisco Joe kept his eyes fixed on the thin dark line away under the hills.

"Guess some of the boys 'll be trail-branded fur rock-bottom beds presently," he observed at length.

As he spoke an arrow whizzed past and struck the burly miner at his side. The man gave a howl of pain and leaped half out of the saddle. In an instant his horse had taken the bit between its teeth, and at two bounds cleared the shelter of the waggon. The rider hung on now quite frantic

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with terror. He had lost all control of the animal, which was flying over the wilderness of stone right into the path of the oncoming redskins, who were now distinctly visible.

"Reckon yer'd better loop the waggons up and fight fur it," called 'Frisco Joe, who appeared to be the only one to retain his self-possession.

Nevertheless, a glance round convinced him that the impending struggle boded ill for his party. The nature of the ground aided the redskins. While it appeared to the naked eye to be one wild, stony level, it was in reality cut up by chasms and ridge after ridge of boulders. The Red Indians knew every inch of its treacherous surface, and came on with hideous war-whoops, feeling sure of their prey. Three separate bands were now visible. The most formidable, because the nearest and largest, had approached unnoticed, even by 'Frisco Joe, from behind. It was an arrow shot by one of these fierce warriors which had struck the burly miner.

'Frisco Joe glanced at the terrified wretch careering along to a sure death with feelings akin to pity.

"I ain't got much fancy fur bein' killed alone by these red fiends," he muttered. "Guess I'll trail along and help him."

He suited the action to the word, turning in his saddle to reply to a flight of arrows with his six-shooter.

"Confound them fools!" he muttered angrily. "They don't know what Injun fighting is. If they'd looped up the waggons and got the horses inside they might have beat the red fiends back. Running like blazes won't save 'em now."

The drivers of the five waggons were lashing their horses into a wild race against the mounted redskins, who were coming up from all quarters hand over hand. The mounted miners had formed round the advance-waggon containing the bulk of the gold. The rest of the party was firing upon the howling redskins from behind the cover of the several waggons. As 'Frisco Joe raced along after his

wounded comrade the horses attached to Jake Simpson's waggon took fright and, swinging the vehicle out of line, bolted in the direction which the brave and kind-hearted miner had taken. On came the red men, discharging a shower of shot which pierced the cover of the runaway waggon and wounding Jake, who was attempting to regain control of the horses.

'Frisco Joe was not the only one who had noticed the mishap to Jake and his party. Oliver Gray, a young miner who had made his pile and owned the second waggon in the line, saw, with feelings of dismay, Jake throw up his arms and lurch over into the midst of his redskin foes.

"My life!" he cried. "Those red demons will kill the girl and Jake's wife. Here, you fellows, stick to the waggon. Make a fight for it. I'm going out yonder."

"They'll send you to limbo without a scalp, pard," cried the young man's companions.

"Let them! They shan't harm the girl if I can help it," he retorted hoarsely.

Leaping into the saddle of a riderless horse, Oliver spurred the brute along in frantic haste. The red men had literally scalped Jake before the eyes of his wife and her companion. Joe had ridden up to the unfortunate miner's assistance, but he also had been cut down ruthlessly and killed. The burly miner had similarly fallen a victim to the ruthless Indians, who were now endeavouring to stop the flight of the waggon horses.

Oliver felt his heart leap to his mouth. Half a dozen red fiends had torn off the waggon cover. He saw two spring upon Jake's wife and subject her to the same terrible fate as her husband had met. Her beautiful companion was seized by a third red fiend, whose knife, upraised to strike her, glittered in the sun. Before it could descend, however, a shot from Oliver's gun was buried in the brain of the assassin. With a scream the young girl darted across the waggon and flung herself bodily upon the back of one of the horses.

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Crack! crack! crack! sped the shots from Oliver's weapon. He himself had been attacked by five or six Indians, but with an impetuosity which amazed even them he had shaken himself free and galloped into the thick of the howling throng, struggling to get at the terrified girl. Three of her assailants fell back uttering their death-screams—the victims of Oliver's three shots.

"Courage, Eva!" shouted the young man. "I'll pierce the heart of the first demon who lays hands on you."

Nor was the threat a vain one. The young man slipped his empty six-shooter into his belt, and whipping out a knife sent its blade quivering into the heart of a befeathered brave who had seized Eva by her beautiful hair. Then, snatching up the poor girl, who had mercifully lost consciousness, Oliver Gray scrambled into the body of the waggon, but he was instantly assailed on all sides. Then a cry, something like a cheer in the distance, caught his ears. The Indians heard it, wavered, and fell back.

Seizing hold of a couple of six-shooters which he found conveniently under the waggon seat, Oliver emptied the contents of both weapons into his retreating foes. Kept up by the excitement of the moment, and almost blinded by the fury which he felt for the Indians who had striven to murder the girl he had long secretly loved, the young man did not observe the approach of two strange horsemen till they were close at hand.

"Bravo, sir! Well done! You fought bravely, and I'm proud to grip your hand!" exclaimed the foremost.

He had ridden alongside the waggon, and mechanically Oliver grasped the stranger's outstretched hand. The second horseman had ridden in pursuit of the flying Indians, who, to Oliver's astonishment, had everywhere taken to flight.

"What is the meaning of this? The red demons have turned tail," he faltered.

"They have no appetite to face the King of the Border," said the stranger, with a pleasant laugh.

"The King of the Border?" Oliver repeated, more mystified than ever.

"Yes, yonder horseman is King of the Border—Buffalo Bill."

"Thank Heaven! Then Buffalo Bill's timely arrival has saved this lady!" exclaimed the young miner fervently.

Then he glanced curiously at his informant.

"Do I put a rude question if I ask who you may be, sir?" he inquired.

"No," laughed the other, in his free and pleasant way. "I'm J. B. Hickok, better known perhaps as Wild Bill."

A hearty cheer greeted both scouts as they rode up to the miners, who recognised them instantly. Oliver had not been far wrong when he declared that Buffalo Bill's timely arrival had saved Eva's life. Nay, it had done more—it had saved the whole party from certain massacre. The Indians, who were quick to recognise the two horsemen, supposed that they were leading reinforcements to the miners, and being panic-stricken by the sudden appearance of the two scouts, had instantly broken away in flight. That they might at any moment discover their error and return was possible, and Buffalo Bill abruptly cut short the miners' greetings.

"There's no time to lose, boys," he cried. "You are seven miles from Misery Point, and my advice to you is—get there! We'll see you along part of the way, so be on the move at once."

One of the waggons was partly cleared, and the bodies of Jake and his wife, 'Frisco Joe, the burly miner who had fallen the first victim in the attack, and three others were placed inside. Oliver, who had brought Eva back to consciousness, placed her inside his own waggon. Both her friends, Jake and his wife, had been killed, and she was now practically alone. The rough but kind-hearted miners were quick to sympathise with her, and in accordance with an unwritten law the property and belongings of her late friends became hers by their death.

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"Keep a good heart, missie," cried one of the men. "Yer've come in fur all Jake's pile, an' he were richer than the lot of us, next after Oliver Gray by yer side, and maybe yer'll jine fortunes, the two of yer. An' I, fur one, would be real glad, I jest would."

A faint blush came over the girl's beautiful face.

"Better drive on, boys," remarked Buffalo Bill, noticing her confusion and gallantly coming to her rescue. "That young man is likely to gain more by this affray than all the others together," he observed to Wild Bill as the cavalcade set forth.

The two scouts parted company with the miners three miles from Misery Point, the next stage.

### CHAPTER 2.

#### A Mystery of the Mountains.

As Buffalo Bill and his friend, Wild Bill, galloped off the cheers of the miners rang in their ears till they passed beyond earshot.

"It's rather unfortunate, from our point of view, that the Bonanza Camp party came on to the scene just then," observed Buffalo Bill. "We've given ourselves away to the Prairie Reds. They'll get back to their mountain lair, and it will cost us some weeks' scouting to find them."

"Can't make out where their village is, though I'll swear it must be somewhere along Dead Man's Range," replied Wild Bill. "They're the crookedest lot of varmints I've ever run up against."

Buffalo Bill laughed, though he scarcely felt in the mood. His reputation was at stake, for Manslayer, Chief of the Prairies, had returned to his old game, and for months past had been committing depredations on Misery Point, varying these proceedings by attacks on the various parties going to or coming from Bonanza Camp gold diggings. Several of these parties the Indians had annihilated.

The two scouts moved along at right angles to the trail and soon descended a slope in the ground, and in a twinkling their line of vision was cut off. Yet that portion of the rocky wilder-

ness that was visible so closely resembled the whole that anyone inexperienced in border life must have been intensely mystified.

"Shouldn't be surprised if we came upon the redskins at any moment," muttered Buffalo Bill.

"I should," rejoined his companion, glancing narrowly round. "Look yonder. How does Dead Man's Range strike you now?"

"There's something very queer about this part of the country; the range is both broader and higher than I supposed."

"Say, the Prairie Reds' village may be inside that range," remarked Wild Bill.

"Anyway, luck is befriending us. We are on their trail with a vengeance."

As Buffalo Bill spoke he pointed to a tell-tale feather which had evidently dropped out of the bonnet of one of the redskin braves. It was lying in the very middle of a stony slope. Wild Bill, slipping out of the saddle, picked up the feather and examined it.

"It's come out of a Snake Indian's bonnet," he whispered in surprise.

"There blood along the trail," continued Buffalo Bill, riding forward and examining the ground with a minuteness that would have astonished anyone but a borderman.

A little reddish stain here and a few trifling splashes there were all that a stranger would have perceived, but Buffalo Bill distinguished other signs which told him plainly that a desperate struggle had occurred but recently at this spot between five or six Prairie Reds and one Snake Indian; that the Snake Indian had finally been vanquished and carried away. Wild Bill's conclusions were practically the same.

"The scent's getting hot," he remarked, as, vaulting into the saddle, he pushed along beside his companion.

Both kept their eyes fixed upon the almost imperceptible trail of blood. Not a word was spoken. They were straining every nerve to drive the trail home before nightfall. The

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shadows were already creeping over the grey waste, but the two scouts were now riding along the base of the bleak, unscalable range, which, on account of the numerous victims it had claimed, had earned the grim title of Dead Man's Range. They had no reason to apprehend immediate danger, but it occurred to them suddenly that they had better look out a suitable camping place. Wild Bill espied a narrow rift in a perpendicular wall of rock on their right hand. Riding up, he found the passage sufficiently wide to admit himself and his horse, and as he plunged in he turned in the saddle, calling to Buffalo Bill to follow.

The latter threw a lingering glance up the trail already nearly obliterated by the deepening shadows. A sigh escaped him. He was annoyed, for the delay occasioned by the darkness in picking up the trail might prove serious. Turning his horse's head, he passed through the gap in the rock close on his friend's heels. The path turned sharply to the left, widening out considerably. Suddenly he drew rein. His quick ears had detected a stealthy sound. Hailing Wild Bill he waited in vain for the latter's reply. Again he hailed, but no reply was forthcoming. Racked with anxiety, he moved his animal slowly and silently forward. It was almost dark now, and Cody found it difficult to pierce the deep shadows which clung to the sides of the gap. He had taken the precaution to draw both six-shooters, and this act of foresight served him in good stead.

All at once his animal plunged and took a flying leap forward. Buffalo Bill could tell by the brute's motion that he had been assailed on both sides by a crafty and silent foe. Letting go the reins, he fired both six-shooters simultaneously. Instantly a chorus of screams mingled with the sounds of Buffalo Bill's shots. The weapons were soon empty. The horse made one plunge and dropped, throwing the scout forward. Before he could rise he was pounced upon and seized by the lurking redskins. Still he fought

desperately, driving off two of his assailants before they could secure his wrists, and managing to severely wound a third with his knife, which he had quickly drawn. Nevertheless, the struggle against such overwhelming odds was fruitless. He was finally borne to the ground and held there, while his wrists and ankles were bound tightly with green hides.

This done, his assailants kindled some pine wood, and in a few minutes the blaze disclosed to the captured scout a kind of natural amphitheatre, shut in by towering walls on all sides. He caught a glimpse of Wild Bill, who had been gagged as well as bound, and was lying on his side about a couple of dozen paces away. The Indians probably numbered fifty, and were all unmounted. One of them, however, mounted Wild Bill's animal, and at a signal which he gave the two prisoners were lifted up and borne along in his rear. The redskins moved forward in a body. After crossing the amphitheatre they struck a path which wound in and out between great boulders and abrupt chasms. This route was dotted by small camp-fires kindled by the little clusters of sentinels which were posted at irregular points along the winding path.

They were approaching the Indian stronghold. After twisting hither and thither in bewildering fashion, sometimes ascending and at others descending, the party suddenly plunged into the pitchy darkness of a mountain cave. For nearly half an hour they moved along without a single ray of light to guide them. But all at once the scout's eyes were dazzled by a lurid glare. A great pine-wood fire was spluttering and shooting out tongues of flame at the further extremity, where, upon the party's approach, ten fierce young bucks sprang out brandishing their tomahawks. A word from the mounted redskin sent them slinking back to their station near the fire. But as the captives were borne past they shouted the Prairie war-cry and upraised their weapons threateningly.

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Outside the cave a strange and startling scene was visible. The path, no longer uneven and rough, sloped smoothly down a grassy bank into what appeared to be a vast valley surrounded above and on all sides by perpendicular mountain crests. The upper slopes of this hidden vale were well timbered. Even in the silvery moonlight the place looked enchanting, and an exclamation of surprise broke from Buffalo Bill's lips. His captors glanced grimly at him.

"No paleface lives who has been brought into the red man's hunting-grounds," snarled one of them significantly.

Cody was forced to admit to himself that the red men had kept their secret well, for no scout, miner, or settler had an inkling of this pleasant oasis in the wilderness of rock and stone. It was evidently situated in the very heart of Dead Man's Range. He glanced up at the perpendicular mountain wall, which the moon had tipped with her pale light. To the right, needle-like crags and bare rocks towered one above the other, rising from the very base of the vale, where a fringe of pine timber grew. In the shelter of the timber nestled the Indian village. Several great camp-fires were blazing merrily, casting quaint reflections among the trees. As the party drew near the village howls of derision, mingled with faint cries of pain, reached the ears of the two prisoners. They understood, too well, the meaning of those sounds. Some poor wretch was being tortured!

A shout went up from the party bearing the scouts along, and in an instant a crowd of redskins, headed by Manslayer, their chief, gathered round their fresh victims. The bearers flung them down near one of the fires, when Wild Bill's gag was removed, and he and Buffalo Bill were closely questioned by the Prairie chief. But neither would utter a word, and amid a grim silence Manslayer pronounced their doom. They were to be tortured to death on the morrow.

Presently Buffalo Bill found himself lying by Wild Bill's side in a wigwam.

"How did they trap you, pard?" he asked in a whisper.

"How do they trap any fool whom they catch star-gazing?" was Wild Bill's half-angry answer. "If I'd had a grain of sense I should have been on the alert. They unhorsed and gagged me before I could utter a cry of warning. What's to be done?"

"Get away, of course."

"How do you propose to manage it?"

"Wait until those red gluttons outside have finished their repast," said Buffalo Bill in an undertone.

No further word was exchanged by the two friends; both were waiting for their enemies to retire to rest. Presently the flap of the wigwam was thrown back and a gigantic Indian, whom Buffalo Bill recognised as the medicine-man of the Prairie tribe, entered. He sat down close by the two prisoners, apparently to act as a watch on them for the night. Then Buffalo Bill performed a feat which astonished his fellow-scout. Fixing his powerful glance upon the medicine-man, by a tremendous exertion of his marvellous will-power the scout succeeded in completely hypnotising the savage, who, as one in a dream, slowly put forth his hand and cut Buffalo Bill's bonds and then submitted to being himself bound and gagged.

Swiftly and silently the scout unfastened Wild Bill's thongs; then the two scouts crept noiselessly out of the wigwam and past the silent forms of several Indians who were curled up in their blankets near the fire, which threw a broad circle of light round that portion of the village. They observed the utmost caution, and slipping into the timber at the base of the hillside they paused and listened. A faint rustle above followed by the fall of some stones arrested their attention and set their hearts throbbing wildly. Had their escape been witnessed? It seemed like it, for suddenly the end of a stout line dropped between them.

"What does it mean?" whispered Wild Bill in a hoarse undertone.

"We can hardly expect it to be the

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act of a friend," returned Buffalo Bill, "seeing that no one can scale those hills outside."

He paused and tried vainly to pierce the gloom overhead. Suddenly he caught the line and tested its strength. It held securely.

"Anything is better than running the gauntlet with those red fiends down here," he whispered. "I'm going to swarm up. Will you follow?"

"Where you go I go," said Wild Bill decisively.

Without another word the two began to climb. Each had managed to secure an Indian knife, and with these weapons at hand they were prepared to encounter the unknown friend or foe above. Hand over hand the two scouts mounted steadily upward, not pausing till they reached the level of a huge jagged boulder where the rope trailed across. Here for a moment they rested.

"We had better draw the rope up before we climb further," whispered Wild Bill, groping round for the line.

Buffalo Bill did the same. Presently an exclamation of disappointment burst from his companion.

"Have you got it?" he asked.

"The rope? No, it's gone!" came the startling reply.

A further cautious search made it plain that the rope was not there. This discovery was anything but pleasant. An imperceptible feeling of dread was growing in the breasts of the two scouts.

"Hark! what's that?" Buffalo Bill exclaimed.

The sound was faint but resembled mocking laughter. It might have been caused by the soughing of the wind through the tree-tops below. Both started, however, and the feeling of dread deepened. It was one thing to meet an open foe and quite another to encounter a secret enemy whose tactics were as uncanny as they were strange. The scouts were at a disadvantage. They could only wait for the dawn and be prepared to face any sudden attack. Still gripping their weapons, they huddled together as much for companionship as warmth.

Dawn broke at last. The first grey streaks outlined the ridge of the hills above, then creeping slowly from crag to crag the light reached the ledge whereon they crouched. One glance sufficed to show that the rope by which they had climbed up had been removed. The two friends exchanged a puzzled glance.

"The whole thing is uncanny," Buffalo Bill whispered.

His companion gave a start.

"Perhaps it's the work of the Spectre Outlaw," he remarked.

"Who is he?"

"You've heard the story of Misery Point?"

"I may have heard it, but if so I forget it."

Before replying Wild Bill threw a searching glance up and down the line of crags around them. No living creature save themselves was visible.

"A goat would find it difficult to climb that ridge," muttered Buffalo Bill.

"Leave the goat out of the question. There's not a soul in Misery Point but would swear that the Spectre Outlaw would succeed where a goat or any other creature failed," said Wild Bill hurriedly. "About fifty years ago," he went on, "a wounded stranger, pursued by these Indians, fled to Misery Point—by the way, the place went by another name then. It was a wild and stormy night, and the owner of 'Miners' Delight'—the best saloon on the Wild West trail in those days—wouldn't risk his precious shanty to the resentment of the Prairie Indians and refused to admit him. The stranger then pronounced a bitter curse against the place, swearing that he would haunt this part of the country till he should witness the utter ruin of the settlement. Certain it is that Misery Point has been decaying since that time. At any rate, when the Indians arrived close upon the fugitive's heels they sacked and burned the saloon to the ground. The stranger may have escaped, for his body was never found, and it's certain the Indians never overtook him, for he had stolen their

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totem, a priceless jewel, which has been missing ever since. But the curious part of the story is that he is said to haunt these hills—Dead Man's Range. Old Man Kraus, his grandson, and a score of other settlers at Misery Point will stake their lives they've seen him at odd intervals."

"You don't believe that story?" interrupted Buffalo Bill.

"The early facts are substantially correct, and it would be comparatively easy for some Wild West desperado to assume the character of the Spectre Outlaw to serve his own nefarious ends."

"That's likely enough," observed Buffalo Bill, "and so, for want of the gentleman's real name, we'll give him his assumed one. You've hit the nail on the head, Bill, and the gentleman has landed us in a very awkward predicament. Perhaps he'll condescend to assist us out of it after stipulating for a substantial ransom. At any rate, it strikes me that we are perched between the Devil and the deep sea, for those beauties below have discovered our escape."

A yell of fury followed this announcement, proving its truth. In an incredibly short space of time the Indian village was roused out of its slumbers and presented a scene of the utmost confusion and alarm. At any moment the scouts' hiding-place might be discovered. They crouched as far back as was possible upon the irregular surface of the boulder, looking down from their dizzy height upon the tops of the pines and beyond the scattered wigwams of the Indian village. They had practically no shelter, and once discovered they must either succumb to hunger and exposure or fall speedy victims to the Indians' arrows. In this extremity they were suddenly horrified to hear a hoarse shout which apparently proceeded from the vicinity of a gaunt crag overhead. The sound instantly attracted the Indians, who as quickly perceived the two fugitives. Their yells were terrifying. Next moment a flight of arrows struck the sides of the rock.

"We've got our friend, the Spectre Outlaw, to thank for that," said Buffalo Bill bitterly.

"By Heaven! he's letting down a rope to enable the brutes to attack us at close quarters!" gasped Wild Bill.

As he spoke the end of a line came hurtling down from the crag above. By whose agency it was lowered neither of the scouts could tell, for no one was visible. The Indians were quick to utilise their advantage, and seizing one end of the rope began to swarm up, uttering their fierce war-cry. The scouts exchanged a quick glance.

"We're cornered now," whispered Wild Bill.

Buffalo Bill peered over the edge of the boulder. The foremost Indian was almost within striking distance.

"Quick! mount the line!" he whispered to Wild Bill. "I'll follow, and don't hesitate to strike if you catch sight of the miscreant who has brought this danger upon us."

"He'll probably cut the line."

"We must risk that. Quick! they are swarming like bees in a hive."

Buffalo Bill's weapon flashed momentarily in the light, a hoarse cry followed its descent as the first Indian went crashing down upon his comrades, some of whom were forced to loosen their grip upon the rope. Only by the exercise of extraordinary agility did the scout save himself from the same terrific fall. He lost the weapon, however, and since it was no longer possible to shake off the remaining redskins, he grasped the rope in both hands and swarmed up after Wild Bill. The latter had neared the top of the crag. Suddenly he uttered a startling cry. Buffalo Bill glanced up and caught a glimpse of his friend's face. It was ghastly white.

"What's the matter?" he inquired sharply.

"The knife!" he gasped. "It's gone!"

"You've dropped it?" said Buffalo Bill.

"No; it has been wrenched from my grasp. I caught the top of the crag

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with it," returned Wild Bill, scrambling on to the crag and gazing wildly round.

Buffalo Bill quickly reached his side. As before so again, not a living creature was visible. The redskins, were, however, rapidly mounting the rope which had been fastened out of reach round a pinnacle of rock. A wild fear possessed the hearts of the scouts, for there was something horribly supernatural in the circumstances attending their flight. The sight of their unknown enemy just then would have come as a welcome relief. Buffalo Bill began to fancy that after all there might be some truth in the strange story of Misery Point. Yet the fastening of the line above their heads was unmistakably the work of flesh and blood. Suddenly he noted a small zigzag path in the rock to their right.

"There lies our avenue of escape," he cried, darting over the jagged crag at the risk of his neck.

The movement was not a moment too soon, for the head and shoulders of a redskin appeared above the crag. The Indian wound himself across its uneven surface, to be followed almost immediately by a second and a third redskin. In less than a minute five Prairie Indians had gained the top of the crag, while twice as many more were swarming up the line. Meanwhile the two scouts, keeping close together, were climbing the zigzag path, exposed to a rapid flight of arrows from the Indians in the valley. They clambered along sometimes on hands and knees, sometimes clinging with their hands to the sharp rocks as the treacherous foothold gave beneath their weight. Presently the Indians below ceased firing, for the braves who were giving chase to the scouts had come within range. Buffalo Bill counted fifteen, and the foremost were scarcely a dozen yards behind Wild Bill. He knew that the path they were climbing could not be the one which the Spectre Outlaw had taken; otherwise he could never have eluded observation so cleverly.

At last, with cut and bleeding

hands, Cody seized a hummock of rock, and swinging momentarily over an awful chasm drew himself on to a smooth ledge. Dropping flat, he waited for Wild Bill to come up, and, as the pursuing redskins made a strenuous effort to overtake him, Buffalo Bill reached out, and grasping his companion drew him safely on to the ledge. A furious yell burst from their pursuers, who beheld the two friends clamber across the ledge, while the first Indian, making a dash after them, missed his grasp and went plunging down the awful chasm, giving an ear-piercing scream. The scouts shuddered. Nevertheless, the rest of the Indians were hot on their trail. Two redskins leaped after them as they crossed the ledge. Suddenly Buffalo Bill stopped short. The ledge had narrowed to less than a couple of yards across, ending abruptly upon a sheer drop into a black, yawning pit. The mouth measured several yards across, and was fringed upon the opposite side by an uprising mass of rock which effectually shut out the view beyond.

"The fiend has lured us here to perish miserably!" cried Buffalo Bill. "He has made no distinction between ourselves and our pursuers!"

Before Wild Bill could offer any comment the two foremost redskins had rushed forward and closed with the paleface fugitives. A fierce struggle followed, which ended in the two Indians being flung into the pit. But others were coming on.

"We can't return!" cried Wild Bill hoarsely. "Better trust ourselves down yonder chasm. If death comes, it will be more merciful than at the hands of these red fiends."

"Ay, jump! I'm ready!" replied Buffalo Bill.

Before the other redskins could reach them the two scouts made a dart for the brink of the pit, and in a flash went over. The fierce war-cry of the Prairies rang in their ears. Then the sound was smothered by the whistling and rushing of the wind as they shot down and down with frightful rapidity through the fearful darkness of the

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mountain chasm. A violent shock was the first intimation Buffalo Bill had that he had struck the bottom. An instant later he was bounding further down. Would that awful fall never cease? he wondered. He was hardly conscious of what happened, but he had a vague recollection of suddenly swinging like a pendulum in mid-air. How long he thus swung he never knew. He was recalled to his senses by hearing his friend's cheery voice near at hand.

"Thank Heaven, Bill, you're safe!" Cody gasped in a voice so weak that it was scarcely above a whisper.

"Don't crow yet, Buffer. We're in a deuced uncomfortable fix," replied Wild Bill. "I'm supporting you, and in turn I'm supported by the carcass of one of those redskins we toppled over ahead of us."

"Better drop me, Bill, and save yourself."

"Blue blazes! What's that?"

A scream, a sickening thud; then another and another followed Wild Bill's startled exclamation.

"Some of the redskins have leaped in after us and have been dashed lifeless to the bottom," said Buffalo Bill, shuddering as the sounds were repeated.

I don't know whether you are right," said Wild Bill in an awed whisper; "only this I know—that something or somebody is moving the corpse I'm clinging to. I'll have to let you go, Bill! Mercy! this horror will drive me mad!"

Wild Bill gave a weird cry. Something had brushed against his face, and instinctively throwing up his hands to ward it off he let go his companion and released his own grasp.

A fiendish peal of laughter suddenly burst overhead and mocked his agony. It chilled the blood of the scouts, who a moment later were mercifully rendered unconscious. They had struck the bottom at last. The laugh was not repeated, and gradually its fearful echoes died away, and the silence of the tomb reigned in the bottom of that awful pit. High above a faint glimmer of daylight strove in vain to

pierce the eternal night which reigned below. Grim silence and impenetrable blackness surrounded the daring but unfortunate scouts.

For a long time—it might have been several hours—the silence lasted. A faint sigh, followed after a short interval by a slight stir, told that life was not altogether extinct. Slowly Wild Bill recovered consciousness. He was lying across something cold and clammy. It was a human body. He had struck it in his descent; and thus been saved from a similar fate. A wild and horrible thought flashed across him. What if this shapeless form was all that remained of Buffalo Bill? In his horror he called his friend loudly by name, and was relieved to get a very faint response. Crawling in the direction whence the sound proceeded, he found Buffalo Bill lying across the bodies of three Indians. It was impossible for the friends to distinguish each other, but by groping about they were able to pick up some of the weapons belonging to the redskins. High above they noticed a faint speck of daylight.

"We have had some wonderful escapes within the last few hours," said Buffalo Bill, "and there is no reason to suppose we are bound to perish in this hole. There must be a way out somewhere. We had better set about finding it. Our worst danger is thirst."

Wild Bill checked a groan. He was already beginning to suffer the tortures of thirst. Moving along the two friends kept close together. The air seemed to grow hot and suffocating. The sound of their footfalls became deadened. At last a cry of surprise and alarm burst from Buffalo Bill, who, throwing out both arms, felt the walls of the tunnel upon both sides. He had become separated from Wild Bill. He called loudly, but his voice seemed smothered. By-and-by he thought he heard footsteps. He listened painfully, becoming convinced that steps were approaching. They ceased, and a burst of mocking laughter rang weirdly in his ears. He drew back against the wall as some-

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thing brushed past. He noticed the glow of a pair of eyes; then, overcome by horror, he lost his balance and fell.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### At the "Miners' Delight."

MISERY POINT consisted of a number of scattered shanties built on a gentle rise near a brawling stream. The place was well named, for it bore the most desolate and uncared-for appearance imaginable. Nothing short of dire necessity kept the settlers there. They were a rough, lawless lot at the best, and lived chiefly by plundering the continuous stream of emigrants and miners going West to the famed Bonanza Camp diggings. Not a tree, not a shrub, not a blade of grass flourished in or about Misery Point, though signs were not wanting that both trees and grass had once been plentiful. The place was visibly under a ban. The party of miners which the two scouts had rescued from the Indians in the afternoon had reached Misery Point, and now, a couple of hours after midnight, most of the settlement and all the visitors were asleep.

The same moon which witnessed the taking of Wild Bill and Buffalo Bill into the Prairie Indians' stronghold was streaming softly through the window of a sleeping-room at the rear of the Miners' Delight Saloon. The window was protected by iron bars within, for the room was on the ground-floor, and the door opened upon a fair-sized yard, in turn protected by a high palisade. Two men were crouching underneath the window. For some minutes past they had been peering through the dirt-encrusted panes of glass, trying to ascertain whether the inmate of the room was asleep.

"Guess we might fix the gold up now, Rube," remarked one of the men. "The gal were dead beat when she turned in two hours ago. There ain't much risk. If she cries we kin gag her. She ain't got no shooting-irons; I see'd that."

"How much gold d'ye reckon she's

got?" asked the man addressed as Rube, in a gruff undertone.

"Near on ten thousand dollars. It's a good haul, but Kraus 'll want a bit," answered the other ruffian, who bore the strange name of Crakerbox.

"Yes, curse him. He don't risk nothing, but he always gits his share," growled Red Rube. "Say," he muttered, "it ain't likely we'll git that gold out without wakin' the gal."

"Not much."

The ruffians faced each other. Each was well aware of what was passing in the other's thoughts. The deed they contemplated bore the ugly name of murder. As a rule, they thought no more of cutting a fellow-creature's throat than they did of eating their dinner; but this case was different. The subject was a beautiful girl, who would be sure to have sympathisers even amongst the lawless crowd at Misery Point. It fared badly in the West with any ruffian who laid his hands upon a woman. Even his companions, whose deeds were as red as his own, would not hesitate to lynch him if they caught him. Both men knew this. Therefore they hesitated.

"Better gag and blindfold the gal," muttered Crakerbox.

Red Rube shook his head.

"No," he muttered. "Dead men tell no tales, nor women either. A screeching out ain't safe when yer wants ter lie low. Say, pard, we'll have to pass in her checks."

Crakerbox shuddered. He was thinking of what the settlers might do.

"P'r'aps yer'd like ter carry the gal off and marry her," suggested Red Rube scornfully.

The thrust pierced the other ruffian's sore point. He had already ventured into matrimony, and a few months later had murdered his unfortunate wife and run off with her savings. That had happened in New York, and, like a good many more, the desperado had drifted to Misery Point. In a weak moment he had confided in Red Rube, and the rogue had not failed to use the advantage.

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"How are yer going ter do it?" asked Crakerbox grimly.

"A tap on the head will do it. Neatest way. You clear out the gold; I'll 'tend to her."

He laughed a soft, cunning laugh. His companion rose to his full height and stretched a hand up across the low, lean-to roof. Silently withdrawing one or two of the shingles he exposed a gap just above the door, and thrusting his hand in softly unfastened the top bolt. Meanwhile Red Rube had prised out a little square of wood at the bottom of the door, and pushing his trembling fingers through, pulled back the lower bolt. This done, the miscreants pushed the door softly open and crept on tiptoe into the room. A small truckle-bed had been drawn up against the further wall. A washing-bowl, a chair without a back, and several empty flour-barrels completed the furniture. Three or four sacks of gold-dust and a locker full of nuggets had been placed at the foot of the bed which contained the sleeping girl. The moonlight streamed across the bed and played softly upon the girl's beautiful face.

Again Crakerbox shuddered and glanced from Red Rube's intended victim to Red Rube himself. The ruffian had drawn his revolver with a view to using the butt-end. Crakerbox made a deprecatory movement. The only result was an angry flourish of the weapon and a glance from his companion, which plainly told him to attend to his part of the business. He saw Red Rube move stealthily nearer the bed. A slight stir on the part of the girl caused both ruffians to catch their breath sharply in suspense.

Red Rube halted about a yard from the bedside. His square-built frame intercepted the rays of moonlight, and plunged the sleeping girl's face into the shade. His weapon went up as he took another step nearer the bed and reached down one hand to thrust over the girl's mouth. But his brutal grasp never touched the sweet mouth. His movement was arrested, for the girl's deep blue eyes opened.

A faint look of horror, followed swiftly by a glad look of recognition, crossed her face.

"Edward, I have found you. Thank Heaven!" she cried eagerly.

The ruffian staggered back.

"Why, it's Eva!" he whispered aghast.

"Eva, and your wife, Edward, remember that," said the girl quickly.

"A nice wife!" sneered the ruffian. "Crakerbox, clear out! Wait for me outside," he added with an oath.

A low cry of fear broke from Eva.

"What is that man doing here, Edward?" she asked.

The ruffian waited till his companion was out of earshot.

"He came for the gold, same as me," he answered sullenly.

The girl sat up, and for the first time she caught sight of Red Rube's revolver.

"Did you mean to kill me?" she asked, in a bewildering whisper.

"How could I know it were you?" was the surly reply.

"Anyhow, you knew I was a lonely girl, defenceless, and you intended to kill me for the sake of the gold. Am I right?"

"I guess so."

"Edward," she cried suddenly, "you deceived me cruelly. I married you because I loved you then, and believed you were a good man. We had scarcely left church when you were arrested on a charge of forgery. That charge was proved to be correct, but you had influential friends, and the sentence was unjustly lenient—a year's imprisonment."

The man muttered an impatient oath, but the girl, unheeding the interruption, went on:

"During that lonely twelvemonth I prayed for you. I hoped when you came out that you would try to redeem the past. You were released a month before your time expired, and you never so much as troubled to inquire for me. Your coldness killed what love remained. Still, I was your wife, and I felt it to be my duty to seek you out and try to bring you to see the folly of this wicked life. For

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eighteen months I have been travelling this Wild West land to find you, and now I find you have stooped so low as to attempt the murder of a helpless girl. Edward—Edward, you will break my heart!"

She could no longer keep back the tears. The rogue was touched.

"I've dropped that name," he growled. "Call me Red Rube."

"I—I, too, have dropped your name," retorted the girl.

"You have?"

"Yes. I'm known as Eva Starling."

"P'raps you're married again," sneered the ruffian.

The girl crimsoned.

"I am not likely to forget that fate has tied me to an unkind and cruel husband already," she replied, checking her sobs.

"And now you've found him, what are you going to do?" asked the rogue, with an oath.

"I won't forsake him, as he forsook me," she answered. "Edward, quit this life. Fortune has been kind to me. I am rich, and if only you will try to reform, I will try to regain the love I once felt for you. Leave this place with me to-morrow," she implored wistfully.

"I daren't leave it openly," he muttered. Then a thought seemed to strike him. He glanced sharply at his young wife. "How about the gold? Who's going to have the handling of it—you or I?" he demanded.

"You shall, Edward."

"Red Rube, you durned fool! Walls have ears sometimes," said the rascal hoarsely.

Eva shrank away as he sat down on the bedside.

"You shall have the gold if you promise to quit this place at once," she said.

"Guess I'm ready ter do that. Look here, my gal. Suppose you get into your toggery and come with me now—in half an hour? Me and my pard 'll get out the waggon. I'm going ter act fair and square arter this. Reckon it's a bargain—eh?"

A faint motion of assent came from the girl, and the rascal, springing to

his feet, gave a low whistle, which brought Crakerbox quickly in. Red Rube pointed to the gold. In five minutes the two ruffians had removed every particle from the room, and placing it in the waggon got the horses out silently.

"What about the girl?" asked Crakerbox.

"She's coming, too. Guess I'll treat her like you treated your missus. There won't be three of us long."

He stopped short, for a figure approached the waggon. It was Eva.

\* \* \* \* \*

For a whole week Misery Point had much to excite it. The prolonged absence of the two scouts caused a good deal of uneasiness, especially when taken in conjunction with the arrival of a number of Snake Indians, who came in ostensibly as friends. As a rule the Snake and Prairie Indians were continually at feud with each other, but there were times when the exception proved the rule. The folk at Misery Point were half-inclined to fancy that this might be one of those times. It made them uneasy. Moreover, the flow of emigration into Bonanza Camp diggings had abruptly ceased, and the prospect of ruin stared the settlers in the face. They were relieved to find that the party from the diggings which had come in a week before showed no signs of departing. The mysterious disappearance of Eva had something to do with this.

Oliver Gray had prevailed upon his party to remain until some intelligence of the girl was forthcoming. Owing to the extraordinary manner of her disappearance opinion was divided as to whether she had gone of her own free will or had been carried off by freebooters. Still, the fact that Crakerbox and Red Rube's disappearance coincided with her own, and that they had neither been seen nor heard of since, seemed to favour the latter hypothesis. Oliver had scoured the country patiently and persistently, but to no purpose. The girl he loved better than life itself had completely vanished.

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It was early night, and he had come in, after a weary day's search, utterly dejected. Most of the crowd were drinking and gambling in the "Miners' Delight," whither he, too, repaired. A rough miner's song was in progress when he entered the saloon, which contained a motley crowd of miners, settlers, and Snake Indians. Plenty of liquor was being consumed, and judging by the lavish display of gold-dust on the tables, Deadshot Kraus, the boss of the place, was doing a roaring business. The young miner called for a cocktail, and sitting down in a corner of the saloon took a keen glance at the reckless crowd. Several ugly quarrels were in progress, all more or less the direct outcome of card-cheating. One or two shots were fired, but the occurrence was too usual to attract very much attention. He had been seated about an hour, when all at once he became aware of an unusually loud commotion down the other end of the saloon. Curiosity prompted him to get up. But he was no sooner on his feet than at a bound he had reached the outskirts of the crowd, only to recoil in dismay.

Three figures had crossed the threshold, and their appearance at that juncture awed the motley crowd into silence. Buffalo Bill and the Spectre Outlaw were supporting between them the half-fainting form of Red Rube, who presented a horrible spectacle, for his eyes were rolling wildly, and he seemed half dead with terror.

"Boys," cried the scout in a thrilling tone, "this man is a traitor."

"He's more. He has murdered Eva Starling!" cried Oliver.

"Listen, and judge for yourselves," continued Buffalo Bill, unheeding the interruption. "You know who I am. Some of you fear me, but you all know that I am to be trusted, that what I speak is the truth. This man, Red Rube, has entered into a compact with the Prairie Indians to sell you all, providing his own vile life is spared and he is enabled to get clean away with this young miner's gold."

"That's not true, pard!" cried Boss Kraus, striding forward.

"Every word of it is Gospel truth. Manslayer, chief of the Prairies, is even now at the back of this saloon with Crakerbox, marking off Oliver Gray's waggon. One hundred Prairie braves are stalking through the village. This treacherous villain has led them here. Look, he wears the badge of the Indians."

The eyes of all were suddenly rivetted on Red Rube's cap, which bore a plume of the red chief's feathers.

"My life!" you're right, sir," cried Kraus. "Boys, Rube's turned on us."

"Kill him!" rose the fierce cry from all throats.

"Ay, and quickly;" yelled the boss, thrusting the nozzle of a pistol into the wretch's right ear. "Such varmin as you ain't fit to live. Curse you, take that!"

Before Buffalo Bill or the Spectre Outlaw could stay the act, Kraus had fired a couple of bullets into the wretch, who dropped at his feet—dead. To the amazement of all, the outlaw gave a faint cry and reeled against Buffalo Bill.

"This, boys, is Eva Starling!" cried the scout, removing the Spectre Outlaw's hat and exposing the girl's beautiful tresses coiled up within.

A half-incredulous cry of joy broke from Oliver, who caught her in both arms.

"Her story is a very simple and sad one," said Buffalo Bill, addressing the wondering crowd. "She was Red Rube's wife. He had treated her shamefully. Nevertheless, she tried to reclaim him, and with that object in view departed with him secretly on the first night of her arrival here. Not content, however, with the fortune she was willing he should take, he hid it and attacked a small party of Bonanza Camp miners coming down East. This lady warned the miners, but, alas! her good offices were too late. The miscreant, with his companion, Crakerbox, murdered them, and then to complete his infamy, struck his wife a blow which he supposed had killed her. He left her for

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dead with his victims, and removing their gold, went off with his companion in crime. Nemesis was on their track, however. They were captured by Manslayer, who relieved them of their spoil and would have killed them both, but they bargained for their lives and agreed to betray Misery Point to the Indians."

As Buffalo Bill said this a rush by some of the crowd was made for their various shanties. Those that remained heard the finish of his startling story.

"Meanwhile, this lady recovered, and being aware that her life was no longer safe, she donned the disguise she is wearing now. It was a new outfit of one of the miners. Very wisely she decided to assume the character of the Spectre Outlaw, knowing that her husband, in common with you all, dreaded that mysterious being, of whose personality, by-the-by, I have a strong suspicion. Luckily she encountered me and came here partly to save a friend and partly on my account."

A cheer from the listeners greeted the finish of Buffalo Bill's recital.

While the crowd in the saloon was still acclaiming the girl's bravery an ominous yell was heard without. Its significance was too well acquainted with to pass unheeded. Instinctively each man drew his weapon and glanced askance at the Snake Indians inside the saloon. The reason for their presence was soon apparent. To Oliver's horror he saw the redskins draw their scalping-knives and tomahawks. Suddenly a fierce yell burst from their throats. Eva uttered a cry of terror, but the young miner, snatching her up in his arms, darted with her to the rear of the saloon as the Indians turned upon their pale-face foes. In less than a minute a fearful fight was in progress inside the "Miners' Delight."

The whites were greatly outnumbered by the redskins, but fought valiantly. Buffalo Bill himself accounted for three or four of the enemy in as many minutes. How the battle would have ended, however, it is difficult to say had not a startling inter-

ruption occurred. An apparition suddenly seemed to flash across the saloon. An old, hook-nosed man with white hair and palsied limbs burst into the midst of the Indians.

"Kill him! Kill Buffalo Bill!" he screamed. "Make sure of him. I hate him!"

He held a swinging kerosene lamp in one hand. The Indians, startled by the newcomer's appearance, and dreading an attempted rescue, crowded round the scout. The old man suddenly raised the blazing lamp, then uttering another unearthly scream, flung it with savage fury at Cody. The lamp burst with a report like a gun, and scattered a fiery plume amongst the Indians. Ablaze from head to foot, the red fiends gave expression to their agony in a perfect pandemonium of wild cries. Buffalo Bill's fresh assailant then fell back foaming at the mouth. He was seized by Boss Kraus, while Oliver, coming to the scout's assistance, dragged him into the saloon. Five settlers only remained, and they, obeying the scout's hurried orders, cleared the saloon of the dead redskins.

"Bar all doors and windows!" cried Buffalo Bill; "we shall soon be assailed from without."

Kraus stood beside him.

"You mustn't mind the old man, sir" he said, "he's mad. Been mad for years, and he's always worse at these times."

"There is, nevertheless, a good deal of method in his madness," was Buffalo Bill's quiet reply.

Kraus turned away to hide the ugly light which gleamed in his dark, shifty eyes. Oliver noted it, and so did Eva, who was just recovering from a swoon caused by the happenings of the past few minutes.

For many hours those in the saloon awaited another attack by the Indians, but happily this did not occur—and for a good reason. A strong party of "boys" from Bonanza Camp, headed by Wild Bill, suddenly dashed up to the "Miners' Delight." They had heard that the place was besieged, and had started to the rescue. On seeing

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their approach the redskins had beaten a retreat, expecting that a still larger force would follow Wild Bill's party.

The meeting between Buffalo Bill and his old pard proved a startler to both.

"William Cody, by all that's wonderful!" shouted Wild Bill. "Why, I thought you'd petered out in Dead Man's Range."

"And you, too, old pard—I'd given you up for lost!" replied Buffalo Bill.

"Reckon we've both got long yarns to spin to each other," said Wild Bill. "But that'll wait till we help you to get a bit ship-shape here."

"Righto, pard!" said Cody, and the newcomers at once set about giving what aid they could to restore order.

### CHAPTER 4. Subterranean Fire.

OLIVER GRAY'S party next morning drew out their waggons and made preparations to quit Misery Point settlement. Oliver himself would have followed their example, but Eva's condition caused him grave anxiety. In the recent conflict she had sustained a sufficiently serious wound to render her removal from the saloon hazardous. On her account he remained behind. Some of the settlers accompanied the party, and by midday Misery Point was sadly lacking in numbers. Amongst those that remained the general opinion was that the Indians, having been dispersed, were not likely to resume the attack for at least some days.

That evening a small but bravely cheerful little party, including the nine miners who had ridden out from Bonanza Camp with Wild Bill, foregathered in the saloon, where Boss Kraus, with unusual liberality, performed the office of host. A keg of his very best whisky was broached for the occasion, and under the genial influence of the liquor the two scouts related before a rough but appreciative audience their adventures in Dead Man's Range. It seemed that after Buffalo Bill had recovered from his swoon in the impenetrable darkness of the subterranean chasm he retraced

his steps till he reached the gap showing the faint speck of daylight above. Here he passed the rest of the day and the succeeding night. By the following dawn he endeavoured to explore the cavity, and in so doing chanced upon a zigzag passage which his training told him had been trod by human feet but recently. Ascending with the utmost caution he at last reached a tortuous path amid the crags above, and finally arrived at the very spot whence the rope had been so mysteriously lowered to aid the ascent of the pursuing Indians. It took him five days to cross the range. He was constantly in danger of recapture and subsisted entirely upon wild game. When he did reach the approach to Misery Point he chanced upon Eva. Such was the sum and substance of Buffalo Bill's story.

Wild Bill listened with interest till his friend finished, when he began his own recital.

"We must have missed each other about the same time," he said, "and it's clear we wandered into separate channels. For a long time I shouted after you like a madman, till at last it began to dawn upon me that the density of the atmosphere smothered my cries. As I groped along further and further into the horrible darkness the air grew hotter and hotter."

"How did the gentleman say he got there?" interrupted old Kraus.

Instinctively all eyes were turned upon the questioner. His face wore a strange expression of cunning mingled with anxiety. Buffalo Bill saw the younger Kraus sign to the old man, who either did not or would not notice the action.

"How did you say you got there, sir?" he repeated.

"I got there by leaping the chasm and losing myself in the infernal blackness underneath," replied the scout.

"Ay, of course. Go on, sir," muttered the old man, settling back.

"Maybe you won't believe the rest, boys," Wild Bill began.

"Ay, tell 'em what you saw," chuckled the madman. "You saw the Spectre Outlaw. I know you did."

## SUBTERRANEAN FIRE.

"Maybe I did. I thought at first it was Buffalo Bill, then I felt it. My life! it was clammy and stone-cold like a corpse. I saw its eyes, boys; they weren't dead. Such eyes! It was pitchy black, mind you, but those eyes pierced me through and through. A kind of creepy horror fixed me up right there, and I'm blessed if I could move for more than half an hour. The thing was gone when I broke loose and I guess I hadn't got much fight left in me just then."

"I reckon yer clapped eyes on that there Spectre Outlaw and no error," remarked Boss Kraus.

"Say, Bill, what more did yer see?" asked several miners in chorus.

"I didn't see anything for two days, and then I was about mad with thirst. I guess I was a bit queer in the head, for things looked that strange you wouldn't believe 'em if I told you."

"Never mind. Fix up the yarn, pard, we ain't particular," said the crowd.

Only Boss Kraus and Manslayer, who remained huddled up, a prisoner, in a corner of the bar, remained silent. Old Kraus sprang up and ambled along to where Wild Bill was seated.

"Speak, sir, speak," he urged hoarsely. "Did you kill him? Say you killed him and I'll die in peace."

"You mean the Spectre Outlaw?"

"Ay. Who else?"

"I didn't kill him," said Wild Bill slowly, "but I came very near it."

"You didn't kill him? Heaven forgive you," croaked the madman. "Fifty years ago—it was an awful night—he cursed me and this place, too, and things have gone cruel bad with us ever since."

The white-haired speaker threw a piteous glance at an Indian chief who lay bound close by, for in the recent fight he had been slightly wounded and taken prisoner. It was, in fact, Manslayer, whose copper-coloured face was now a study. The Indian returned the look, then, slightly raising himself on his elbows, he blurted out:

"My white brother speaks truly. The Spectre Outlaw carries the curse of the Prairie nation."

"Say, pard Bill, what did yer see?" repeated the little crowd impatiently.

"I saw the infernal regions," was the startling reply.

An uncomfortable laugh went round the group.

"That ain't very likely, Bill. Say, did yer catch a glimpse of the Spectre Outlaw?"

"I came upon him just round a bend in the passage where it weren't no longer dark. I tell you, boys, the ground was ablaze, crackling, and sputtering, and throwing off great clouds of smoke. I saw him quite plainly, and I sprang at him. He weren't no spirit, but a mortal man like you and me. He struggled uncommon hard, but I got him under and managed to claw out a bit of his hair. Here it is, boys."

There was a low murmur of horror as Wild Bill held up to their inspection a tuft of hair coloured green!

"That man may be mortal, but he ain't natural," put in Boss Kraus, shuddering as he took the hair from Buffalo Bill, who had been examining it.

The old man started back profoundly agitated.

"He threw me," went on Wild Bill, "and knocked me fairly silly. Anyway, I lost him and never saw him again. But I'll swear there weren't no mistake that the end of the cave was ablaze. Look here! I went a bit too near, and it's a mercy I'm alive."

He pulled back his jacket and displayed his vest, which was badly scorched and in some parts burned quite away.

"I must have been stark mad at the time, but I just located a big cloud of smoke which went pouring down one of the passages. I followed it till it nigh choked me, then I dropped flat and wriggled along like a serpent. Suddenly I catches sight of daylight. It was an uncommonly hard squeeze to get through the gap in the rock, but I managed it, or I just reckon I wouldn't have been here."

"Guess you ain't accounted fer all the time, pard," observed one of the

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miners, who fancied that Wild Bill was romancing.

"I reckon not. Outside that gap there was water. I guess I must have drunk a pailful, and, believe me or not, I was as weak as a baby and couldn't do nothing for three days but sit and drink and pick the marrow out of the bones of a stripped buffalo. I was mortal afraid the Indians would find me. Then I made tracks for here. The rest, I guess, you know."

"We don't know who that outlaw is," said Boss Kraus hurriedly.

"He were a stranger when he first came nigh this place, getting on fifty years to a day," interposed the old man in a husky voice. "He wanted shelter, an' I drove him from the door. 'Curse you, Kraus!' he screamed. 'Curse you and this durned camp. Misery Point yer'll come to call it, for I've done wiv yew. The Injuns is after me. I've got their totem, and, by the curse of the red devils, I'll haunt ye night and day till there ain't a shanty left in Misery Point. D'ye hear? Misery Point ye'll call yer camp.'"

The maniac was gesticulating wildly. It was evident to all that the scene he was recalling had turned his brain long ago and would haunt him to his dying hour. Boss Kraus was his grandson. His son had been killed by the Prairies some years before.

"That's him, sir; you see'd him," he continued, shaking a claw-like hand at Wild Bill.

"His curse blasted my shanty; I ain't been the same since. True as I'm a living man, the next stranger what came along the trail found the shanty half-burned down by the Injuns, and he calls the place Misery Point—the very words of that there Spectre Outlaw. It ain't no lies, boys; ask the Injun."

Manslayer nodded. He, too, had become excited as he listened to the madman's recital.

"My white brother was a fool!" he growled, striking an attitude partly defiant. "Why did he let the white thief get away with the red man's totem?"

The maniac's eyes glittered.

"The red chief speaks like a child," he croaked. "Did the white man know the Prairie totem was the Restless Star, the fairest jewel in the great West land? No. He would have killed his white brother and sold the red man's totem down East. Ha, ha, ha! I'll find it yet. The Spectre Outlaw shall yield the Restless Star to old Kraus yet. Boys, I'll die rich. That totem is an opal, and it's worth a million dollars."

"My father, Bull Sides, put the curse of the Prairie nation on the red man's totem when the white stranger stole it away," said Manslayer fiercely. "Let my white brother beware lest he find it."

At this moment a flash of vivid lightning and a peal of thunder warned the few settlers who were present that a storm was beating up. They quitted the saloon hurriedly, anxious to seek the shelter of their own shanties before the storm burst. One or two of the miners who had come down with Wild Bill accepted their proffered hospitality, leaving the rest to pass the night under the roof of the "Miners' Delight."

An hour later the storm was raging fiercely over Misery Point. Buffalo Bill had secured one of the upper rooms in the saloon where he intended to pass the night with Wild Bill, and where Kraus had served them with a liberal supper. They were as comfortable as circumstances would permit, and both were discussing the extraordinary adventures which had befallen them in the course of the last few days. The talk drifted to their host and the madman.

"I believe Kraus knows more of this so-called outlaw than he cares to tell," remarked Buffalo Bill.

"So do I."

The two friends smoked on for some minutes in silence. Their train of thought was very similar. In short, it occurred to each that the mysterious outlaw, whoever he might have been originally, was impersonated now by no other than the madman himself. Haunted by the knowledge that the

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stranger whom he had refused to shelter had possessed a jewel of priceless value, the old man's avarice had overcome his fears and led him to explore Dead Man's Range, since that was the most likely spot a desperate fugitive would choose for hiding. It was certain the latter's body had never been found, while he could not have got clear of the neighbourhood, for the Indians, having discovered their loss almost as soon as it occurred, had immediately closed all avenues of escape. The most striking fact remained that the Indians had not recovered their priceless totem. How the tribe had first become possessed of this totem would never be known. It was an opal, Wild Bill explained, of extraordinary size and beauty, and, moreover, was reputed to possess magic properties. The tribe had certainly dwindled in numbers and importance since the stone had been lost.\*

"This hair has been taken from an Indian scalp and dyed green," Buffalo Bill went on, holding up the tuft which his friend had exposed to the miners.

Wild Bill glanced up sharply.

"That is exactly my opinion," he said; "and, what's more, the wearer was the madman. In tearing the hair from the scalp I inflicted a nasty cut in his left ear, and I noticed the wound to-night. Still, to give the poor wretch the benefit of the doubt, I do not believe he is aware of the part he plays. There is cunning in all madness, and he has apparently got it into his head that you and I are after that opal, which would explain his fierce desire to kill us."

"Perhaps so. But I confess you puzzled me—"

"You refer to the fire?"

"Yes."

"I was in sorry straits at the time

\* Amongst all the great fighting tribes of the plains and Rocky Mountains their totem or medicine is their most prized possession. It may be even a stick or stone, but so long as it is in the possession of the tribe, that tribe is supposed to have the special protection of the Big Spirit. Should misfortune overtake them they account for it by supposing their enemies possess a superior totem to themselves.—ED.

and may have exaggerated the sight,'" admitted Wild Bill; "but I'll swear there was smoke, and there is never smoke without fire. Besides, I discovered coal—vast deposits, which may have been kindled by some careless act of the madman. The fire must have been burning some months —perhaps longer."

"Then Misery Point is threatened by a fresh and even graver danger," observed Buffalo Bill. "These subterranean coal fires sometimes smoulder for years. Now I think of it, mining for coal was once attempted in the neighbourhood, and the prospects of success were good till the Indians massacred the miners."

"Hist! What's that? What's happened?" cried Wild Bill suddenly.

His voice was smothered by a fearful crash without, which sounded momentarily louder and more awful than the incessant rattle of thunder. The building was shaken to its foundations. Buffalo Bill started from his seat and took a few rapid strides to the window. He was almost blinded by the next lightning flash. He caught a momentary glimpse of some figures on the storm-beaten waste outside the shanty and a sharp cry of alarm burst from his lips.

"There's treachery on foot," he shouted. "I saw Deadshot Kraus on horseback bearing off Eva Starling!"

Wild Bill had reached his side and was now peering into the pitchy blackness outside. Suddenly the lightning blazed out, revealing objects which had attracted Buffalo Bill's attention. He was about to reply, when another fearful crash sounded without. The house rocked as though shaken by an earthquake. Both scouts made a rush for the door. It was locked!

"Batter it down!" cried Buffalo Bill.

Both men darted back a few paces and then dashed their combined weight impetuously against the door. The attempt had to be repeated before the woodwork showed signs of yielding. At last the door gave with a splintering crash. Leaping over the debris into the passage, the scrys

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dashed down the stairs. At the end of a dark corridor a door gave admittance to the saloon. This door, too, had been securely fastened upon the other side.

"There's something remarkably strange in this," said Buffalo Bill. "The men were to occupy the saloon for the night. They cannot have been overpowered by Kraus alone, and if the settlers should have aided the villain we must have overheard the sounds of strife. Phew! did you get a whiff of that, Bill? The air is poisoned!"

The scouts regarded each other in the next lightning flash. They were very pale, and both wore looks of intense anxiety.

"This will never do!" cried Buffalo Bill. "We must break in the door at all hazards and at once if we hope to save the girl."

"Better drop from the window above," Wild Bill suggested.

"Come; give me a hand here."

Buffalo Bill had seized a stout log, and, assisted by his companion, he commenced to use it as a battering-ram against the securely-fastened door. This obstacle gave way at last and the two lurched forward into the saloon, lit up brilliantly by the incessant flashes of light. An alarming sight met their gaze. Lying about the floor were the bodies of the seven miners, all apparently dead, while huddled up near the outer door, bound hand and foot, they caught a glimpse of Oliver Gray. A short, choking cry burst from Wild Bill, who suddenly staggered, and, to Buffalo Bill's amazement, fell prone.

"What jugglery is this?" muttered the chief of scouts, almost fiercely. "Bill, what's wrong? What's the matter, old friend?"

His companion did not answer. At a bound Buffalo Bill reached his side. Then he, too, staggered, and would have fallen but for his prompt precaution in drawing backwards. Seizing his friend by the legs, he dragged him over the fallen door. Next he poured some spirit down Wild Bill's throat, and to his unbounded relief saw the

latter was reviving. All at once he noted that while the lightning flashed as frequently as before, its brilliance was fast decreasing. Suddenly the room plunged into a thick, murky gloom, which increased in density every moment. The scout heard a faint moan, which he rightly concluded came from Oliver Gray. The sound was instantly smothered in the fierce warring of the elements outside. But in the next lull he heard the sound repeated.

Wild Bill had by this time sufficiently recovered to get up.

"The worst has happened," he said hoarsely. "The saloon is filled with the deadly after-damp."

"Gray is over by the door. He's alive. We must make a run for it. The outer door is sure to be unfastened," said Buffalo Bill.

"I'm ready."

"Follow me. Keep your mouth closed. We must get Gray out and try to save those poor fellows."

So saying, Buffalo Bill dashed into the murky gloom and literally fought his way through the poison-laden air. As he had expected, the outer door was not fastened. Quickly throwing it open, he lifted the young miner out into the wind and rain-swept waste. Wild Bill followed close at his heels.

"They have carried her off," groaned Oliver. "Save her! Kraus, Manslayer, and the madman have fled the shanty. They say it's doomed!"

Suddenly there was a great blinding flash of flame overhead, and at the same moment a loud, crashing roar like the firing of a great gun, and the ground shook as though recoiling after the discharge. The three men were almost blinded by the vivid light.

"The saloon has been struck," Buffalo Bill cried. "Quick, get the men out if you can. I'm going after Kraus."

He had cut loose Oliver's thongs, and the young miner leaped up. A wild glance over the brilliantly-illuminated waste disclosed the fugitive in the distance.

"There he goes!" he shrieked, starting to run across the open.

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Buffalo Bill had disappeared. The piteous whinnying of the horses corralled in the rear had reached his ears. He secured one of the animals, and galloping round to the front of the saloon he found that Oliver had returned bent upon securing another. Wild Bill had dragged into the open the body of one of the miners.

"You can do most good here by helping to get these poor fellows out," cried the scout, "I'll bring back Eva. Stake the horses; they will come in handy later on."

Before Oliver could reply Buffalo Bill had started away at a gallop. He was about to offer objections to the scout's plan, but hearing a cry for help, he hurried into the saloon, and found Wild Bill gallantly striving to remove a couple of the insensible miners, while nearly overcome by the poisonous fumes himself. Oliver at once saw the wisdom of Buffalo Bill's plan. Running to the scout's help, he lightened him of one of his burdens, and together they removed the two men into comparative safety without. Alas! one of the unconscious men had already succumbed to the fumes.

"I doubt if the others can possibly survive," Wild Bill observed.

But his words were drowned by the noise of the storm, although his companion partly guessed their meaning. Bravely the two entered the saloon once more, and after a short interval spent in its deadly atmosphere reappeared with two other bodies. It was clear to both that they would have to make a dash to secure the remaining two miners, for the upper part of the shanty was blazing furiously, in spite of the rain which swept down in torrents. At any moment the flooring might give way and bury the remaining miners under the ruins.

"Run for your life if you hear the walls give," shouted Wild Bill, making a final dash into the doomed building.

He was followed by Oliver. Though the lightning played vividly outside, and the whole of the upper floors were ruddy with flames, yet a pall-like cloud filled the interior of the saloon. It seemed to have increased in density

within the last minute. The black vapour all at once shifted and rushed up through a rift which suddenly appeared in the ceiling overhead. Instantly the saloon was flooded by a lurid light, disclosing in the floor a gaping rent. One side fell away, laying bare a portion of the foundations of the shanty.

"Look!" cried Oliver, aghast, "there is fire beneath."

"I guessed as much," replied Wild Bill, turning away with a shudder, for he caught sight of the bodies of the two unfortunate miners, both of whom had been precipitated a few feet down the chasm.

Oliver suddenly grasped his arm and drew his attention to their means of exit, which, to their unspeakable horror, had become blocked by a quantity of smouldering ruins. The whole front of the shanty was beginning to totter, while suddenly, as a gust of wind struck the doomed building, part of the ceiling crashed down.

"We shall be buried alive!" cried the scout.

Both made a dash for the partly blocked door, which was swaying ominously under the stress of wind and rain beating against the outer walls of the building. They reached it as with renewed fury the storm burst into activity once more.

"Quick! Quick!" cried Wild Bill.

The walls swayed once, twice, then with a dull rattle they fell in. Just as the building collapsed the two men scrambled over the ruins before the door, and sprang on to the rain-sodden ground outside. One of the miners who had been first removed had recovered consciousness and was kneeling over two of his comrades. He gave the scout and Oliver a startled glance as they came bounding down close by his side.

"Where's the rest?" he shouted.

"Lost!" cried Wild Bill.

"By Heaven! it's Deadshot Kraus's doing."

All at once Oliver remembered the horses. Leaving Wild Bill with his companion to aid in bringing the miners back to consciousness, he

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climbed a portion of the smouldering ruins and dashed to the rear of the fallen building, where the horses were corralled. Terror had driven the poor brutes nearly frantic, and it was only with the utmost difficulty that he succeeded in removing them in safety. He had barely staked them outside the ruins of the shanty, when the palisade disappeared down a fresh rent in the ground. A dense cloud of smoke rolled up, blotting out the ruins of the saloon and threatening to overpower the survivors with its deadly, poisonous fumes.

Fortunately Oliver's attention was engaged, or the agony of suspense which he must have endured on Eva's account would have sufficed to unhinge his mind. He returned to Wild Bill. The scout saw that he was becoming uneasy, and to keep his mind from dwelling on the girl's danger he questioned Oliver regarding the movements of Kraus prior to his flight. The young miner had stationed himself in the passage behind the saloon at the foot of the stairs, as being thus better able to keep watch over Eva, who occupied one of the rooms above. He had been dozing, when the sound of an awful crash roused him into activity. It was the same crash which had first startled Buffalo Bill. To Oliver's surprise the miners who were passing the night in the saloon, and whom up to that point he had heard laughing and talking, were suddenly still.

Fearing that something was amiss, Oliver had entered the saloon, to find the miners lying prone and still upon the floor, overcome by the poisonous fumes. Darting to the head of the stairs, he was in the act of calling for help, when he caught sight of Manslayer and the madman bearing Eva down the stairs between them. With a cry which the storm had drowned, he sprang to her rescue, but ere he could free her he was felled by a blow from behind. His assailant was Kraus, who proceeded to bind his limbs while the redskin chief held Eva a prisoner. Meanwhile old Kraus had saddled three horses, and bringing

them round to the front of the saloon the party passed out, placing Oliver, bound and helpless, inside the door. Kraus, his grandfather, and the Indian chief appeared to be quaking with fear. The old man muttered something of the curse of the Spectre Outlaw being fulfilled as he passed out, while Manslayer had expressed a wish that the scouts would be tempted to follow them.

So much Wild Bill learned from Oliver. Of the five miners they had rescued together only three recovered. Suddenly, during a lull in the thunder, they distinctly heard the sound of distant firing, coupled with the hoarse war-whoop of the Indians.

When Buffalo Bill rode out into the storm he caught sight of the fugitives a quarter of a mile away. Galloping rapidly after them he was a trifle surprised to note that they seemed neither to advance nor retreat. He was sure that Deadshot Kraus had observed him. Suddenly his animal reared, staggered, and shied. Buffalo Bill kept his seat and attempted to bring the horse round again. But the attempt proved very nearly fatal. He was suddenly seized by a strange feeling of suffocation, followed by a momentary obliteration of consciousness. The necessity for immediate action alone saved him. He reeled and dropped from the saddle as a blaze of light burst asunder the black clouds overhead and illumined the storm-swept waste for several seconds. He was lying upon the very brink of a rugged chasm, which sent up streams of poisonous vapour.

All at once Wild Bill's description of the subterranean fire flashed upon him. In a moment he was up, while the mystery of the Indians' inactivity was explained. The saloon, with a portion of the ground surrounding it, had been cut off by the sudden formation of this chasm. That would account also for the fugitive's strange manœuvre. Buffalo Bill had been saved from a horrible fate by the sagacity of his horse, which, trembling in every limb, stood rooted to the spot terrified by the earsplitting

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crashes of thunder and the blinding flashes of light. Seizing the bridle, he jumped into the saddle and was about to dash along in pursuit of Deadshot Kraus, when two horsemen suddenly loomed up on his left side.

"Halt!" he shouted hoarsely, addressing the two horsemen who, though no longer visible, he knew were lurking in the vicinity. "Who are you? Friends or foes?"

No reply followed the scout's interrogation. The darkness was too intense to enable him to make out more than a very faint, shadowy outline in front of him. No movements were audible, owing to the ceaseless swish, swish of the rain sweeping along the waste. Buffalo Bill's animal contrived to edge away from the brink of the chasm, and relying on the brute's unerring instinct the scout made no effort to check its movements.

All at once he felt a grip laid upon his arm. Crack! went his revolver. A heavy fall and a sharp cry of surprise followed. Before Buffalo Bill could grasp what had happened the terrible war-cry of the Prairies rang in his ears and his left arm was pierced by the sharp point of an Indian scalping-knife. He wheeled swiftly about and fired into the darkness. Next instant a fiery ribbon streamed athwart the blackness and such a crash of thunder rang out as made the very ground shake. Buffalo Bill caught a glimpse of his foes. His first shot had laid low the madman's horse, while the madman himself had taken to his heels and was running from the spot. His more dangerous assailant was Manslayer, the Prairie chief. The Indian's hand was upraised to strike the scout when the blinding light seemed to envelop them both.

An almost human cry of terror burst from Buffalo Bill's horse. Next moment the animal rolled over, and the scout, stunned for a moment, lay still. The horse had been struck and killed by the lightning, but its rider had escaped. Leaping up, the latter sprang towards Manslayer, whose horse was rearing madly. The Indian made a murderous lunge at him, but Buffalo

Bill fired with deadly aim, and the chief crashed over, shot through the heart. The scout then sprang upon the redskin's horse, which made frantic but unavailing efforts to shake its fresh rider off.

At last Buffalo Bill got the terrified creature well under control, and uttering a shout which the warring of the elements drowned he galloped towards Kraus. The latter had now been intercepted by Wild Bill and Oliver and was fighting for his life. Though he still held possession of Eva it was evident that her presence greatly hampered his movements. After a brief struggle Wild Bill dragged the girl away. Two or three of the miners who had recovered from the effects of the poisonous fumes were racing to the spot. Kraus caught sight of them, and as Wild Bill placed the maiden in the arms of the first one to come up and dashed to Oliver's assistance Kraus struck his horse a cutting blow with his bowie-knife and sent the animal plunging wildly between his two assailants.

All at once the villain caught sight of Buffalo Bill and changed his course. It was as much as he could do to control the animal, which, mad with pain and terror, swerved aside, and to the horror of all present bucked and threw its rider head-foremost into the chasm.

"Death is playing havoc in Misery Point to-night," said Buffalo Bill, extending his hand to Wild Bill, who wrung it warmly.

"Thank Heaven you have so far escaped, Cody. Four miners are lost, and as for the settlers in the distant shanties, Heaven help them!"

At this moment there sounded a terrific thunderclap, and, as if the storm had reserved its might and fury for the last, the whole heavens seemed one mass of flame, which gathered up in the form of a ball nearly overhead and plunged with a lurid flash to the earth.

"A thunderbolt!" muttered the two scouts, for a moment appalled.

The meteorite struck the rain-soaked ground with a report like the

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firing of a mighty gun. Ploughing its way down, it scattered stones and great boulders in all directions, and then for some minutes the waste was plunged into darkness. Then Eva uttered a terrified cry and pointed a trembling hand to the spot where the thunderbolt had fallen. A bluish-white mist hung over the place, and a short, sharp gasp of fear broke from the watchers as a strange and frightful object rose out of the ground ahead. The earth seemed to crumble away, and mounting higher and higher was a human skeleton with hideous head and vacant sockets.

A wave of hot air brushed the faces of the spectators, and in a moment a gaping pit had appeared, showing the fiery red abyss almost one hundred feet beneath.

"Boys, what's that?"

It was Buffalo Bill who spoke and drew the attention of the whole party upon a scarcely human object leaping from boulder to boulder, sometimes running over the uneven waste, sometimes crawling, but at every move drawing nearer and nearer to the mysterious skeleton. At last it reached the edge of the gaping pit, and taking a mighty leap cleared the space and landed beside the bones of the dead.

"That's old Kraus, the madman!" Buffalo Bill cried.

He was right. The unfortunate maniac was horribly illuminated, for the flames playing over the form of the skeleton twined weirdly about him, too. He made one vain effort to beat them back, then stooping he wrenched something from the bony clasp of the dead, and giving another shrill cry of agony and terror, he held up before the eyes of the horrified spectators the Restless Star.

"I've found the opal—the Prairies' totem!" he screamed. "I'm rich—rich! Save me! Mercy, the flames!"

Assistance was impossible, for the pit belched forth a thick cloud of steam and vapour, accompanied by hungry jets of flame, which curled round the madman, who, making a wild leap, fell short of the opposite edge and went down with an agonised

scream into the very heart of the subterranean fire.

\* \* \* \*

Not till some days later did Wild Bill and Buffalo Bill explore all that was left of Misery Point, and then they were accompanied by a strong band of miners from Bonanza Camp, whither they had found their way with the remnant of the settlers on that eventful night of the storm. The subterranean fire, which Wild Bill had been the first to discover, was still burning. The spot where the "Miners' Delight" had stood was intersected by numerous gaping cracks, sending up wreaths of bluish vapour. The shanty had been totally consumed.

The skeleton had crumbled to dust. The bones had probably been those of the fugitive whom the maniac had sent adrift fifty years before. His fate had been a horrible one, for Buffalo Bill ascertained that a bog had existed there about that time, and he must have been engulfed alive. The coal deposits beneath were found by experts to extend over a wide area, and a company was formed to work them.

Misery Point was never rebuilt, but the Indians were forced from their stronghold in the vicinity of Dead Man's Range, where buildings were soon put up to form another and larger settlement. Oliver Gray became one of the largest shareholders in the coal mining company, and he frequently visited the spot with Eva, his wife.

THE END.

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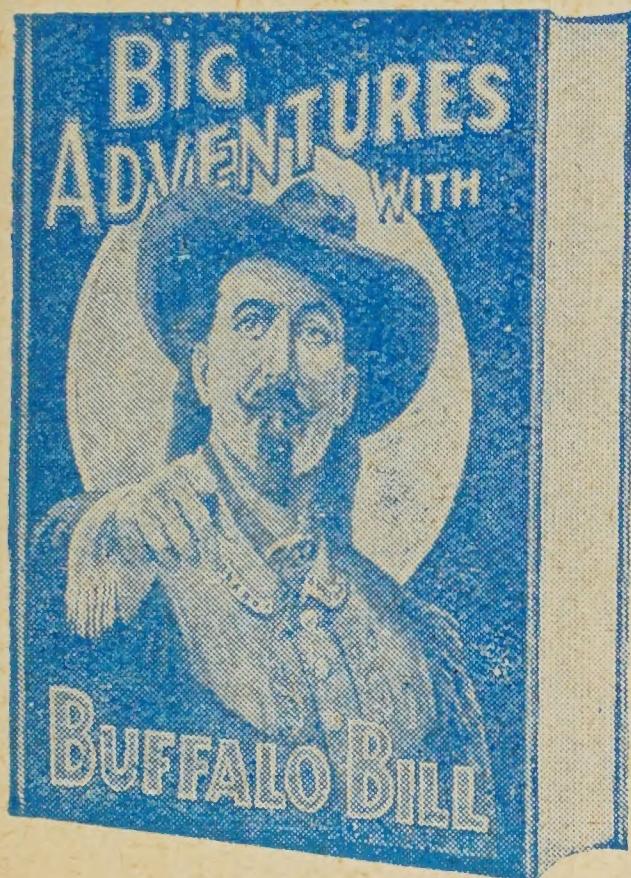
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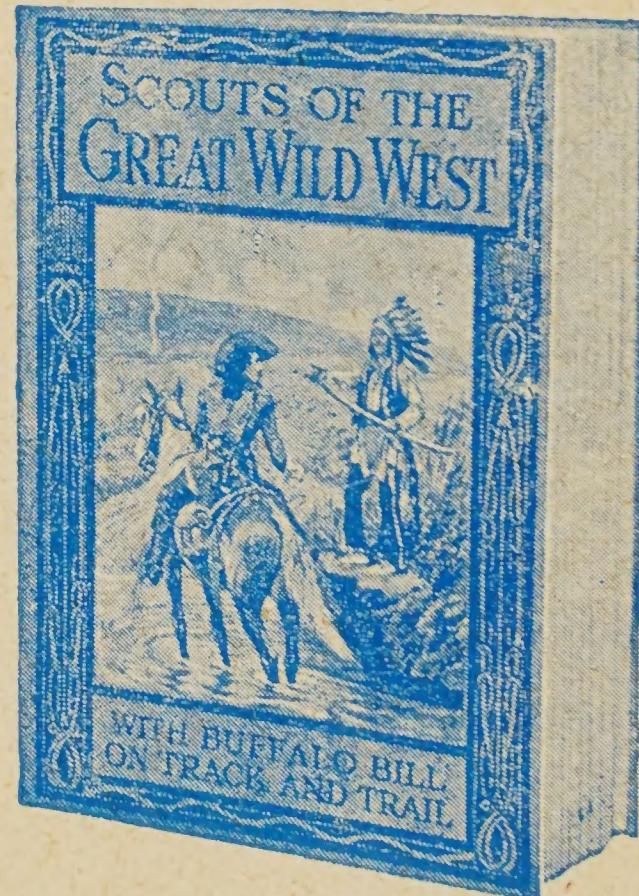
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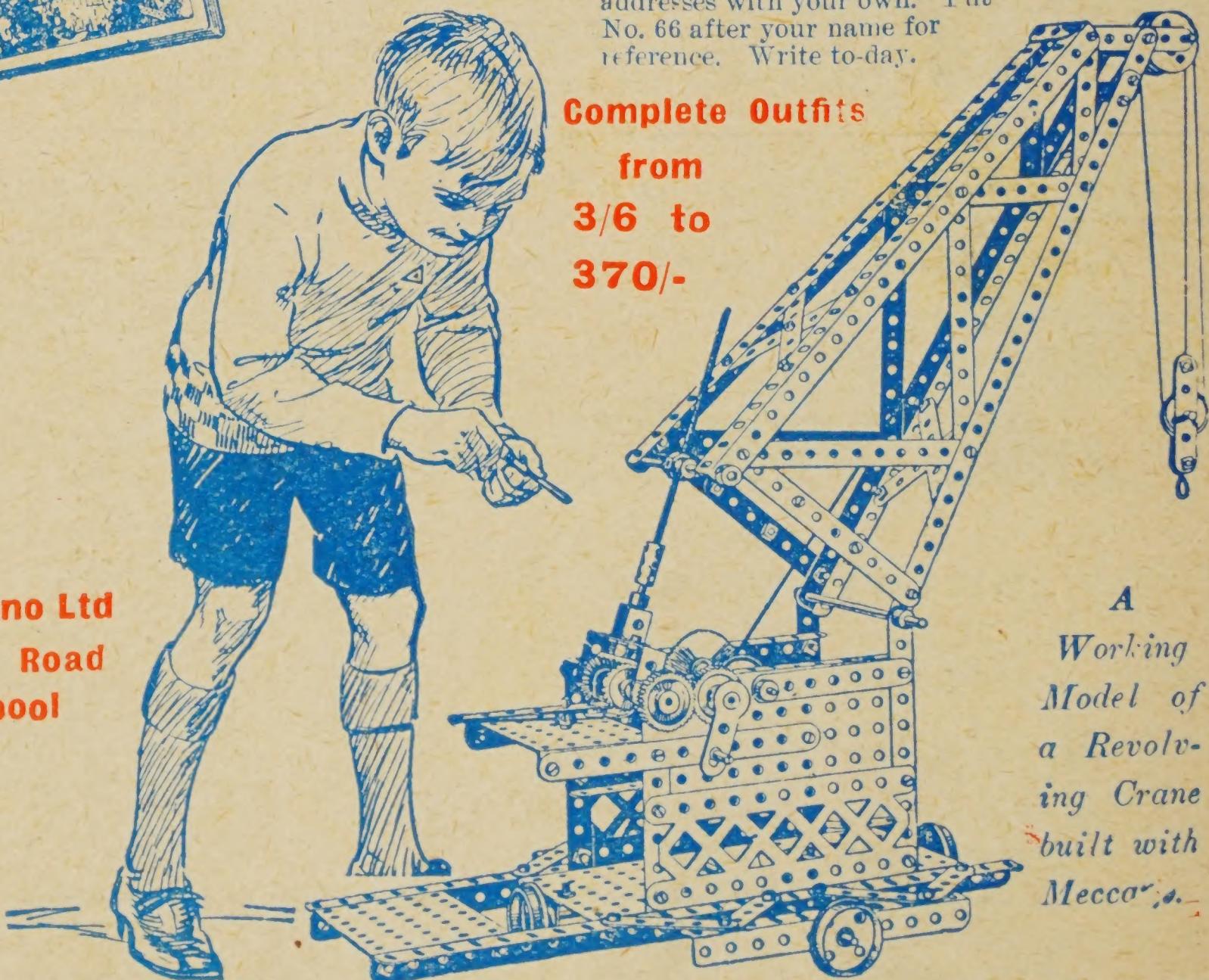
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